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# THE COSMOPOLITAN SCREEN

*German Cinema and the Global Imaginary,  
1945 to the Present*

STEPHAN K. SCHINDLER AND LUTZ KOEPNICK, EDITORS

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## Colorful Worlds

### The West German Revue Film of the 1950s

*Sabine Hake*

On the following pages, you will meet a strange cast of characters: field slaves from Mississippi, steel bands from Trinidad, sheriffs from Puerto Rico, Mexican *campesinos* and *senioritas*, and, of course, the European musical stars who performed these American stereotypes in one of the most disparaged genres of German cinema, the 1950s West German revue film. What you will not find are the real-life American soldiers and businessmen who personified the fundamental economic, social, and cultural transformations referred to as postwar Americanization.<sup>1</sup> In conjuring up this fantastic mixture of ethnic characters, locations, and milieus, I want to draw attention to a group of relatively unknown films that were produced with considerable professional competence and moderate commercial success during the years of the Economic Miracle.<sup>2</sup> Their elaborate production numbers, extensive rehearsal scenes, and highlights from opening nights share an almost compulsive preoccupation with the scenarios of ethnicity that, after 1945, had been banned from high culture and political discourse. The long tradition of stylistic hybridization and cross-cultural fertilization in the revue format and the well-established filmic conventions concerning the representation of music and dance in German cinema provided a convenient framework for the production of performative excess. And through these performative qualities, I argue in the following, the revue genre made possible a highly circumscribed reenactment of racial otherness. Through their fundamental difference from contemporary narratives, the ethnic scenarios allowed postwar audiences simultaneously to reassert and to disavow their own investment in the question of race and nation. This complicated dynamic of self and Other in the restaging of German identity is not only essential for

understanding the processes of projection and incorporation that accompanied the normalization of public life under the conditions of Allied occupation and cultural Americanization. The dependency of postwar definitions of Germanness on an ethnic Other also sheds new light on the function of "America" as a marker of difference in the ongoing reconceptualization both of German cinema as a national/transnational cinema and of Germany as a postnational, multicultural society.

Approaching the revue film on its own terms allows me to examine the contribution of these colorful fantasies to larger developments in postwar West German society without having to equate its formal conventionality with either artistic mediocrity or affirmative ideology.<sup>3</sup> In defining the historical parameters of this examination, three closely related points are worth making at the outset. To begin with, the revue film responded to a second wave of Americanization—and subsequent Germanization of U.S. cultural imports—during the years of the Economic Miracle. This process is most apparent in the selective adaptation of contemporary American styles to popular music and dance forms. However, in contrast to earlier manifestations of the genre, the postwar revue film absorbed these new influences by conjuring up another kind of imaginary "America"—one identified with folk culture, ethnic culture, and the lives of traditional societies and preindustrial communities. Channeled through the perspective of what might be called retroprimitivism—that is, a nostalgic evocation of the primitive as a vessel for decidedly contemporary scenarios of identity—this staged performance of the New World has little in common with the progressive, urban, modern spirit of Weimar Americanism that, in various manifestations and permutations, became an integral part of cultural, social, and economic practices after World War II. And in formal terms, the phantasmagoric effects associated with such retroprimitivism are fundamentally dependent on, but also limited to, the spatial and psychological divisions established by the proscenium arch. The proscenium in the revue films strictly separates the spectacle from the spectators and prevents any direct encounters between the ethnic stereotypes on the stage and the German protagonists in the narrative. Last but not least, this divided *mise-en-scène*, in which the spectators in the diegesis function as a stand-in for the contemporary audience, produces the binaries of ethnic versus nonethnic through which Germanness—and this is the secret referent in all production numbers—can be articulated outside the taboo categories of race and nation. No longer enlisted in the making of alternately optimistic and

pessimistic visions of German modernity, "America" thus becomes a projection screen for a number of competing fantasies about race, folk, and community and about the relationship between cultural tradition and modernity.

Yet how does the spectacle of ethnicity generate and facilitate these discursive effects? Through the processes of commodification associated with the culture industry or through the elusive strategies of postmodern citation? Should we regard these production numbers as a particularly obvious example of mass-produced kitsch, or are they more adequately described through the aesthetics of camp, including its ironic self-awareness? Can we attribute the irreverent play with stereotypes—or rather fragments of stereotypes—to the emergence of more fluid definitions of identity, including in terms of queer sensibility, or are the artificial settings indicative of a more problematic fixation on the question of ethnicity? In order to address some of these questions, we must pay closer attention to the generic conventions that organize the production and reception of these postwar phantasmagorias of difference. They establish the conditions under which the formal and stylistic legacies of the variety show and the revue theater were enlisted in the survival, or revival, of those ethnic representations banned from the spheres of high culture and official politics. More specifically, the performance of an ethnic Other allowed the members of the entrepreneurial new middle classes—the intended audience in, and of, these colorful stories of individual effort and reward—to proclaim their freedom from all external determinants and to pursue their goals with aggressive determination. Needless to say, the division between world and stage established by the proscenium organizes these two paradigms of identity in fundamentally unequal terms, the all too familiar discourses of alterity (e.g., exoticism, primitivism) that hold together the production numbers and the new discourses of normalization, called the Economic Miracle, that dominate in the narratives. Precisely this inequality, I argue, serves as the generative principle behind the celebration of America as an ethnic Other.

Within these formal constraints, the production numbers provide a seductive mise-en-scène for articulating the difference between those bodies marked as ethnic and those marked as nonethnic: that is, as German. But what kind of ethnic(ized) figures facilitate such fantastic investments? Obviously all are marked as ethnic through their identification with particular costumes, settings, locations, and, most importantly, musical forms and dance styles. In addition to the standard classical, traditional, and modern numbers, the typical revue pro-

gram of the 1950s included North American dance and music styles like the foxtrot, swing, and rock and roll as well as Latin standards like rumba, calypso, bossa nova, and cha-cha. With costume and set design defining the setting and with music establishing the mood, the group dances were choreographed to express the presumed essence of the ethnic body through clichéd references to traditional folk culture and contemporary interpretations of these traditions. Responsible for adding psychological interiority, the songs strengthened the bond between soloist and ensemble through the musical encoding of temperament, mentality, and, especially in the plantation numbers, of soul. Aiming at both a re-essentializing of the body and a remapping of the topographies of ethnicity, the combination of song and dance consequently served two equally important functions: to celebrate "America" as a model of cultural hybridization and, in less obvious ways, to represent Germanness as an unarticulated, undifferentiated and therefore fully modern category.<sup>4</sup>

A rather typical approach to the staging of an ethnicized "America" can be found in the Willy Zeyn-Film production *Tausend Sterne leuchten* (A Thousand Stars Aglitter, 1959, dir. Harald Philipp). Its revue program, suggestively called "colorful world," reflects quite self-consciously on the changing meaning of "America" in postwar culture by offering compensatory fantasies of German agency and control. The underlying fascination with a premodern, rather than modern, America finds expression in several numbers that rely heavily on contemporary styles to achieve their anachronistic effects. These include a raucous "Billy the Kid" Wild West saloon number with cowboys dancing—or, rather, stomping—to rock and roll music, a "Mississippi Blues" plantation number complete with black slaves carrying bales of cotton, and a lively song-and-dance number titled "Love on the Island of Trinidad."<sup>5</sup> Throughout, the number principle of the stage revue helps to contain the potentially transgressive effects of what I have called retroprimitivism. Thus in the same way that the "male" adventure of the Western frontier is counterbalanced by the "female" romance of the antebellum South, the hedonism of the tropics is incorporated in a later Dixieland number that translates the foreign musical elements (e.g., "black" vocal styles) into more familiar "white" rhythms (i.e., the same melodies but without syncopation). During the grand finale, these German-American hybrid identities become fully available to the rituals of cultural consumption once their exotic otherness are safely incorporated into the perspectives of mass tourism. As promised by the agaves, pine trees, and cypresses from the vaguely



*Tausend Sterne leuchten* (A Thousand Stars Aglitter, 1959, dir. Harald Philipp).  
(Courtesy Filmmuseum Berlin Deutsche Kinemathek.)

Mediterranean set designs, the possibility of wish fulfillment lies within easy reach to most postwar audiences: namely, in the form of a vacation trip to Italy or Spain.

The West German revival of the revue film, a genre that had thrived during World War II, facilitated these kinds of symbolic investments through generic conventions so different from the classical Hollywood musical of the 1950s that they warrant a brief comparison between German and American approaches to the filmic representation of song and dance. To begin with the all-important question of *mise-en-scène*, the classical Hollywood musical seeks to blur the lines between stage and world through a naturalization of performance.<sup>6</sup> Unlike the UFA (Universum Film AG) sound film operettas of the early 1930s, the revue film heightens the same difference by relying on elements of theatricality. Where the former simulates the thrill of live performance through filmic means, including innovative editing and camerawork, the latter relies on enthusiastic audiences in the diegesis to “prove” the quality of a stage program. The extensive rehearsal scenes in the musical aim at a narrativization of performance, while the elaborate production numbers in the revue film reduce song and dance to a consum-

able spectacle. Confirming this point, most production numbers are shot frontally, as a theatrical event, and lack the camera movements and shot, countershot patterns that elsewhere help to integrate the performance into the narrative. The high degree of self-reflexivity in the classical Hollywood musical affirms the power of entertainment through the double mechanisms of demystification and remystification. In achieving these effects, most backstage stories focus on a performer’s determined pursuit of artistic recognition and success. In the revue film, the stories about troubled productions and struggling theaters are typically told from the perspective of management and its financial or legal problems. Artistic ambitions and concerns clearly play a secondary role; the heavy reliance on clichés and stereotypes is never questioned. Throughout, the divisions established by the proscenium remain firmly in place, even in the open seating arrangement found in the fashionable nightclubs and dinner theaters. As a consequence, the stars perform only on the stage; off the stage, they want nothing more than to be respectable members of the old or new middle classes.

Recognizing the differences between the West German revue film and the Hollywood musical of the 1950s does not necessarily mean accepting the military etymology of the term *revue* and assume an inherent link between aesthetics and politics in the German case. Siegfried Kracauer’s reflections on the “mass ornament” have prompted some speculation about the affinities between stage choreography and the militarization of society, especially under National Socialism.<sup>7</sup> However, it is not always productive to equate ossified forms of representation with “ossified forms of perception,”<sup>8</sup> especially when dealing with an “excessive” genre such as the revue film.<sup>9</sup> Greater attention to its performative qualities and the constitutive tension between spectacle and spectatorship suggests more complicated socio-psychological investments that can only be reconstructed through the historical conditions of production and reception. After all, it was the genre’s standardized formal and thematic elements that allowed choreographers during the 1950s to abandon the celebration of the collective (e.g., in the chorus line) for the reaffirmation of the individual (e.g., through the emphasis on the soloist). The experiments with serialization and reproducibility found in the theatrical revue format of the 1920s thus gave way to the infinite combinations promised by ethnicity as a proto-postmodern fantasy. Taking advantage of the genre’s highly eclectic approach, the directors and producers specializing in the revue film after 1945 were consequently able to utilize its old-fashioned musical and theatrical styles for the demands of a new entertainment and

consumer culture, including its touristy perspectives on an exoticized and eroticized Other. The generative principle behind these new symbolic investments resembles the process of appropriation and incorporation that characterized the Americanization of German popular culture and the simultaneous Germanization of American forms, styles, and sensibilities in West German postwar culture as a whole. Of course, in the case of the revue films, the question remains: what was the purpose of such musical hybridization? To simulate and thereby work through the racial theories of the past and replace them with more flexible definitions of culture and identity? Or to use the spectacle of the racialized Other in the reconstruction of West German identity, a process that responded in direct and indirect ways to the Allied Occupation and the cold war?

Answering these questions requires a closer look at the individuals responsible for creating these fantasies of "America" as ethnic Other. A small number of producers dominated the field, including the enterprising Artur Brauner of CCC (Central Cinema Company), who, in more than one film, cast Hubert von Meyerinck as a frantic (and decidedly queer) theater owner or stage manager. Playing his competent secretary and resourceful factotum, Ruth Stephan and Rudolf Platte infused the stories with the kind of forced optimism and frantic activism that, interestingly, also characterized the troubled West German film industry.<sup>10</sup> The lead performers always included a few older UFA stars such as Hungarian Marika Rökk, but the vast majority came from an international group of young recording stars, including French-born Caterina Valente and Silvio Francesco, Swiss Vico Torriani, Austrians Peter Alexander and Freddy Quinn, Swedish Bibi Johns, British Chris Howland, American Bill Ramsey, and, in two famous guest roles, Louis Armstrong in the 1959 productions *La Paloma* (dir. Paul Martin) and *Die Nacht vor der Premiere* (The Night before the Premiere, dir. Georg Jacoby). The appearance of these international stars in a German-language environment was made possible by the widespread practice of dubbing and the creative use of accents, including by German singers and dancers pretending to be foreigners. More often than not, a star's nationality had little to do with his or her screen persona; for instance, Valente and Torriani usually played Italians. Largely because of financial constraints, conventional forms and derivative styles prevailed in the approach to orchestration and choreography. The revue format offered only limited opportunities for talented dancers like Ellen and Alice Kessler and experienced choreographers like Sabine Röss, responsible for many of the colorful Caribbean

numbers. Musical accompaniment was provided by radio orchestras such as the Berlin-based RIAS-Tanzorchester, the orchestra of choice for most CCC productions. Dance ensembles were on loan from state operas, revue theaters, and, beginning in the late 1950s, public television channels (e.g., in the case of Südfunkballett), a fact that, together with a uniquely German approach to *mise-en-scène* already codified during the silent film era, contributed to the enduring preference for frontal staging and theatrical effects.

The creative personnel of the postwar revue film produced a steady stream of ethnic scenarios that were much too dependent on generic convention and stylistic eclecticism simply to be equated with the ideologies of race and nation—although there exist compelling reasons (perhaps to be examined on another occasion) to speculate about the political function of these colorful, if not outright garish, spectacles of race and ethnicity in the larger context of 1950s popular culture. In theatrical terms, these production numbers may be described to practice a form of "blackface"—of being *braun angemalt* (painted brown), to quote the stage manager from *Ramona* (1961, dir. Paul Martin)—and can thus be connected to the genre's long history of "ethnic drag," to appropriate a phrase from Katrin Sieg.<sup>11</sup> The revue format has always depended on a well-established iconography of the Other, from the orientalist scenarios (e.g., inspired by Persia or China) in the popular variety shows of the 1910s to the erotic fantasies (e.g., surrounding images of blackness) familiar from the spectacular revues of the 1920s. However, the West German revue films of the 1950s stand out through a heightened awareness of, if not compulsive fascination with, the performativity of identity that can only be explained through the contribution of these production numbers to the emergence after 1945 of "America" as an ethnic category.

Since the 1910s, the identification of Americanization with mechanization, homogenization, and standardization (e.g., in the figure of the New Woman) has been accompanied by a complementary fantasy based on the association of America with the kind of primitivism captured most problematically in the figure of the "Negro."<sup>12</sup> In the theater, cinema, and concert hall, the gradual transformation of an ethnic America into the prehistory of a fully Americanized Europe can be seen in the cult status of 1920s revue stars such as Josephine Baker as well as in the enthusiastic reception of Louis Armstrong during the 1950s. In the German case, these strategies of exclusion and incorporation are further complicated by their connection to the National Socialist rhetoric of racial and cultural decadence and their diatribes

against the “niggerization (*Verniggerung*) of music and theater,” to cite a slogan from the infamous 1937 Degenerate Art Exhibition.<sup>13</sup> In resisting the coupling of Americanism with modernization, postwar filmmakers (in the West) failed to reconnect to the cultural legacies of Weimar culture and, in ways more familiar from Third Reich cinema (e.g., Detlef Sierck’s 1938 Puerto Rico film *La Habanera*), enlisted the antebellum South, the Caribbean, and, less frequently, South America in two equally problematic discursive operations, the normalization of racialized imagery through the association with stage performance and musical entertainment and the reconceptualization of Germanness outside the tainted categories of *Volk* and nation.

Of course, this divided *mise-en-scène* requires certain prohibitions on representation—namely, that the set designs never resemble actual places, that the ethnic characters never cross over into the main story, and that the German protagonists never become part of the stage fantasy.<sup>14</sup> If they do, more aggressive forms of racial stereotyping have to be mobilized. To give one example, in Geza von Cziffra’s *Die Beine von Dolores* (*The Legs of Dolores*, 1957), a wealthy African American woman, referred to by everyone as the “chocolate lady,” saves a struggling revue theater from bankruptcy and, in so doing, allows the entrepreneurial Germans to realize their own dreams of fame and fortune. Yet the assumption of power by the “native” woman in the narrative eventually calls for a compensatory stage fantasy in the form of a nostalgic plantation number set in rural Alabama. Through the cutting back and forth between the “Uncle Tom” figure on the stage and the “chocolate lady” in the audience, the woman is punished for her “transgressions” and reclaimed for the visual spectacle of primitivism. Achieving similar integrative effects, *Der Stern von Santa Clara* (*The Star of Santa Clara*, 1958, dir. Werner Jacobs) opens with a lively production number that, through the vehicle of traditional Mexican folk culture, thematizes the Americanization of postwar Europe. The two theme songs about the teenagers from “Tampico” and “Tennessee” present two different models of *Volkstümlichkeit* (popularity), the harmonious convergence of ethnic and popular culture identified with traditional Latin culture and the explosive combination of soul, blues, and rock and roll associated with the American South. Ending with a hymn to American youth culture and its leveling effects, the ecstatic staging of a mass-produced popular culture beyond a specific time and place appears blissfully indifferent to the divided reception of postwar Americanization as either liberation or colonization. But again, the perspective of the diegetic spectators in the theater facilitates a supple-



Louis Armstrong during the production of *La Paloma* (1959, dir. Paul Martin). With Wolf Brauner, cinematographer Karl Loeb, and assistant director Jochen Wiedermann. (Courtesy Filmmuseum Berlin—Deutsche Kinemathek.)

mental fantasy in which the association of America with popular culture (i.e., folk culture) makes possible the self-representation of West German postwar society as the full realization of German modernity. Because the performers on the stage remain defined by their (fake) ethnic costumes, the members in the audience can overcome such confining categories in their own lives. Bringing together both sides in this spectatorial relationship, the exemplary stories of effort, failure, and reward acted out by the narrative’s enterprising producers and managers implicate the revue film directly in the heroic narratives of the Economic Miracle and its forceful assertion of West German identity as fully modern, which also means: as unmarked by ethnic or national characteristics.

The overdetermined function of the production numbers becomes even more apparent once we move from generic analysis to the larger context of film production and cultural consumption. At a time when many established musical genres (e.g., film operettas, composer films) seemed less and less able to accommodate contemporary tastes and sensibilities, the revue film, too, found itself simultaneously relying on, and attempting to move beyond, the highly standardized modes of production developed to perfection in the old UFA studios. The inevitable crisis of the revue format was acknowledged in the almost compulsive self-thematization necessitated by the growing competition from more fashionable musical forms such as jazz, rock and roll, and the so-called *Schlager* (literally: hit song). Producers responded to the problem of declining mass appeal by taking greater advantage of the close relationship between the film and recording industries by coordinating new releases with a singer's concert tours and media campaigns (e.g., in the case of CCC and Polydor). Similar economic considerations, this time linked to the profitable business of ballroom dancing schools and amateur dance competitions, stood behind the German reception of Hollywood films with a Latin American or Caribbean theme and the widespread fascination with all things Latin in popular music and consumer culture, including women's fashions. With European markets no longer accessible during the war years, Hollywood studios during the 1940s had turned to Latin America in order to cultivate the "other" American markets south of the border. In postwar Germany, this pattern of marketing otherness continued in the enthusiastic postwar reception of American mass culture from the 1940s and 1950s. Thus aside from the enduring fascination with Hollywood versions of Latin America and the Caribbean that fueled the West German success of Carmen Miranda extravaganzas like *Road to Rio* (1947, dir. Norman Z. McLeod) as well as ambitious screen adaptations like *Carmen Jones* (1954, dir. Otto Preminger), musical tastes on both sides of the Atlantic now shifted more and more to Anglo-American cultural topographies. The wholesome lifestyles of the Midwest depicted in rural musicals like *Oklahoma!* (1955, dir. Fred Zinnemann) allowed West German audiences to indulge their nostalgic interest in folk traditions, whereas the culture of the Old South proved susceptible to their own strategies of cultural revisionism, as evidenced by the popular appeal of a classical Broadway production like *Show Boat* (1951, dir. George Sidney) and the screen adaptation of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1959, dir. Otto Preminger). All of these films had a strong influence on the West German revue film.

The revue film's love affair with Latin music coincided with the gradual assimilation of jazz and blues traditions to mainstream musical tastes, a process that had started in West Germany's artistic and intellectual subcultures. Yet the real challenge to the revue film's continued viability came from the commercialized youth culture that had made possible the phenomenal success of rock and roll both in the original American idioms and in the Germanized versions popularized by youth idols like Buddy Holly look-alike Peter Kraus. Relying on its long tradition of hybridization, the revue film utilized all three musical influences in its desperate efforts at modernization. To give only one example, the inclusion of Latin styles in the standard ballroom repertoire allowed choreographers to blur the boundaries that, until that point, had distinguished folk and popular dance through their different relationship to tradition and modernity. However, such gestures toward contemporary tastes were limited to musical styles and did not extend to the oppositional stance associated with these other musical traditions (e.g., the critique of conservative sexual morality). For that reason, the revue film ultimately proved less successful in attracting new youth audiences than in sustaining the interest of the faithful UFA fan community, an indication of the growing obsolescence of the variety format and its rigid divisions between narrative and spectacle, despite the genre's proto-postmodern visual sensibilities.

Apart from the international orientation in the cast of performers and the choice of musical styles, the modernizing impulses in the genre are most apparent in its own narratives of self-renewal. Two approaches can be found: the call for a radical break with established traditions and the integration of new styles into existing formulas. The possibility of reconciling convention and innovation is addressed in two Marika Röck vehicles directed by Georg Jacoby and choreographed by Sabine Röss. In the finale of *Sensation in San Remo* (1951), the well-known singer-dancer calls for an opening of German musical culture toward more contemporary styles. Presenting her argument with typical didactic zeal, Röck reprimands a group of elderly professors for their old-fashioned tastes: "Your views about modern dance are not up-to-date." To make her point, she leads the white-haired scholars through a short history of twentieth-century dance that culminates in an apotheosis of big-city life, complete with black extras. In *Nachts im grünen Kakadu* (At the Green Cockatoo by Night, 1957), Röck guides her theater audience through a similar tour de force, from a sentimental waltz and wild boogie-woogie to the obligatory Caribbean number with black men, white sails, steel drums, and plenty



*Nachts im grünen Kakadu* (At the Green Cockatoo by Night, 1957, dir. Georg Jacoby). (Courtesy Filmmuseum Berlin—Deutsche Kinemathek.)

of bananas. Taking a slightly different approach but with the same integrative effects, *La Paloma* presents its argument for a modernization of the genre through the competition between two rival West Berlin revue theaters, the Metropol and the Plaza, both of which are using the eponymous popular Spanish song to put together a more contemporary and, hopefully, commercially more successful program.

The heavy reliance on folk elements in these production numbers also brings into relief another imaginary topography, the validation of enlightened modernity in the staging of European culture (e.g., in the Italian numbers) and the cultivation of folkloristic scenarios through the spectacle of a premodern America. In reassigning the sites of ethnicity along the modern versus traditional, European versus American divide, the postwar revue film was able to draw upon well-established theatrical traditions and, even more important, a long history of musical hybridization in German cinema. After all, the genre had developed out of the variety format prevalent in the early cinema of attractions (e.g., in the Wintergarten of the Skladanowsky brothers), found inspiration in the spectacular revues from the 1920s (e.g., at the Metropol Theater and the Haller Revue), and acquired its filmic credentials by updating the European tradition of song and dance (e.g., the Viennese

operetta) through an infusion of more contemporary American styles (e.g., the ornamental choreography of Busby Berkeley, the tap dancing of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers).<sup>15</sup> Early in the sound film period the revue film took full advantage of the various traditions identified with American and central European culture in demonstrating its simultaneous commitment to regional and national, popular and folkloristic, and modern and traditional influences. During the postwar period, it was precisely this amalgamation of German, American, and central European elements that sustained the relationship between two very different *mise-en-scènes*, the traditional folk cultures evoked in the celebration of an ethnic Other (i.e., the performance on the stage) and the homogeneous, upwardly mobile middle-class society created by the Economic Miracle (i.e., the audience in the theater).

The function of ethnicity in the West German revue film can be further clarified through a brief look at the other musical genres that similarly attempted to reclaim a normalized Germanness through the collective identities conjured up by song-and-dance performances.<sup>16</sup> Old-fashioned film operettas during the period continued to rely on Viennese sentimentality to make the Habsburg monarchy appear as a perfect model of social harmony and cultural refinement (e.g., in the 1962 production of *Die Fledermaus*). The popular *Schlagerfilme* Germanized contemporary American styles like rock and roll in an attempt to incorporate the threat of rebellious youth into the social and cultural rituals of the emerging *Wohlstandsgesellschaft* (e.g., in the Peter Kraus vehicle *Tausend Melodien* [A Thousand Melodies, 1956, dir. Hans Deppe]). Even the *Heimatfilme* provided a musical setting for the affirmation of regional culture in the context of local anniversaries and folk festivals (e.g., in *Am Brunnen vor dem Tore* [At the Well in Front of the Gate, 1952, dir. Hans Wolff]). The revue films differed from these other musical forms in two ways, their resistance to narrative integration and their insistence on visual spectacle. In the *Heimatfilme* and *Schlagerfilme*, song and dance remained an integral part of the narrative—which means that the threat of the Other (e.g., in the form of “alien” musical styles) could be contained through the means of confrontation and, eventually, incorporation. By contrast, the revue films highlighted the fundamental opposition between theater and world and celebrated their different modes of identity and performativity. The lack of narrative integration gave choreographers license to present the Other as pure fantasy, a quality that played a pivotal role in the elevation of “America” to a model of traditional folk culture. Likewise, the sharp distinction between the illusionism of

visual spectacle and the (false) realism of the narrative established a formal structure for the assertion of German normalcy against the staged scenarios of alterity.

Perhaps the strongest case for the overdetermined function of ethnicity in the production numbers can be made through a brief comparison to the East German revue film. All of the films mentioned thus far establish a *mise-en-scène* for the performance of an ethnic Other; which also means that they facilitate a reenactment of the suppressed discourse of race through the (modified) generic conventions identified with the legacies of UFA. In merging narrative and musical space, DEFA (Deutsche Film-Aktiengesellschaft) productions aim at a very different discursive effect: the thematization of the conditions of production in the new socialist film culture and nationalized film industry. Thus, where the West German films highlight the creative possibilities of the individual in a free market economy, the East German films emphasize the individual's contribution to the building of a truly socialist society. While the spatial divisions established by the proscenium arch allowed West German filmmakers to assert the modernity of the Federal Republic against an ethnic Other identified as American, the unification of narrative and spectacle enabled their East German counterparts to assume a fundamentally different relationship to the process of modernization, namely one inspired by the experience of nationalization and collectivization in the German Democratic Republic.

Open about their didactic intentions, the DEFA revue films narrativize the search for a better relationship between popular and socialist culture by breaking with the genre's problematic reliance on ethnic, racial, and national stereotypes. In developing more relevant topics, settings, and protagonists for their production numbers, the artists and their audiences partake in a larger political project that ultimately aims at the performance of a unified identity beyond class differences. *Silvesterpunsch* (New Year's Eve Punch, 1960, dir. Günter Reisch) and *Revue um Mitternacht* (Midnight Revue, 1962, dir. Gottfried Kolditz) achieve this necessary transition from the stereotypical revue elements to the socialist spectacle of labor and industry in an almost programmatic fashion. In *Silvesterpunsch*, preparations for the New Year's Eve party of a chemical combine occasion a heated debate about the recreational needs of the workers and the responsibility of the entertainers to remain "connected to the people" (*volksverbunden*). After many arguments, a compromise solution is reached under which the traditions of regional folk culture can coexist peacefully with the cult of

technology celebrated in the "Song of Calcium Carbide" number. Working on a new revue show, Manfred Krug in *Revue um Mitternacht* similarly considers a number of popular dance styles, including cancan, waltz, tango, and Charleston, but quickly dismisses all of them as typical expressions of bourgeois individualism. Finally, he and his collaborators find a more appealing model for their emerging society in what, based on their slick "Symphony of the Big City" number, might be called socialist modernism. Typical urban settings like gas stations and traffic intersections are enlisted in a triumphant choreography of modernization that recalls both the cosmopolitanism of *West Side Story* (1961, dir. Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise) and the collectivism propagated by the more politicized Eastern Bloc musicals showcased recently in the postcommunist compilation film *East Side Story* (1997, dir. Dana Ranga).

The surprising similarities in the preoccupation with generic traditions and the very different responses to the problem of staging nation and race bring into relief the competing ideological projects that sustained West and East German cinema during the 1950s, not least in relation to the divergent German-German narratives of mass culture and modernity generated by the Economic Miracle and the cold war. From this perspective, a symptomatic reading of the revue genre allow us to connect the ethnic stereotyping in the production numbers to other, seemingly unrelated postwar phenomena. For instance, how must we interpret the pervasive fascination with ethnicity as an aspect of tourism, consumerism, and mass entertainment in relation to the economic goals of reconstruction and the political goals of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past)? To what degree is the ethnicized topography of the Other also a function of the Allied Occupation and the cold war with their very different national and transnational fantasies? And in what ways does the revue film contribute to the overlapping binaries of German versus American, and West German versus East German—that is, the binaries that sustained the genre's imaginary topographies in relation to the Economic Miracle in the West and the building of socialism in the East?<sup>17</sup>

To return to the critical terms laid out at the beginning, the fascination with America as the ethnic Other in the West German revue films of the 1950s allowed contemporary audiences simultaneously to address and to suppress the question of ethnicity and race and, in so doing, to set into motion the process of postwar normalization. Within the spatial divisions established by the proscenium, the spectacle of a fixed, stable identity located in the "primitive" American body gave

purpose and meaning to the entrepreneurial, materialist, consumerist, and upwardly mobile new middle classes created by the Economic Miracle. And it is precisely through such aesthetic and discursive investments that a quintessentially "impure" genre such as the revue film opens up new ways of thinking about film genres and musical styles outside the rigid opposition of the national and the transnational. For the production numbers discussed on the previous pages clearly demonstrate that the categories of identity and performance cannot be reduced to the binaries of stage versus world, reality versus fantasy, but must be evaluated through the elusive dynamics of spectacle and spectatorship organized by the proscenium arch and processed through the musical articulation of exoticism, eroticism, and what I have called retroprimitivism. Consequently, the revue film allows us to trace fundamental changes in the articulation of ethnic identities that, from the perspective of German and European unification, marks the beginning of more far-reaching developments associated today with such terms as multiculturalism and cultural hybridity. At the same time, the revue film brings into relief the highly unstable meaning of "America" as a category of self and Other—a characteristic that must be considered of greatest relevance to a better understanding of Americanization as the negative foil of German identity in its various filmic, musical, and performative manifestations.

#### Notes

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1. One notable exception can be found in *Paloma* (1959), where three GIs in a restaurant give a folksy rendition of "Tom Dooley," complete with fake American accents; compare the friendly reactions of the other guests to the deep anxieties about cultural colonization thematized in an earlier musical comedy like *Hallo Fräulein!* (Hello, Fraulein!, 1949, dir. Rudolf Jugert).

2. For an introduction to postwar cinema in the Federal Republic, see Claudius Seidl, *Der deutsche Film der fünfziger Jahre* (Munich: Heyne, 1987); Ursula Bessen, *Trümmer und Träume. Nachkriegszeit und fünfziger Jahre auf Zelluloid. Deutsche Spielfilme als Zeugnisse ihrer Zeit. Eine Dokumentation* (Bochum: Studienverlag Dr. N. Brockmeyer, 1989); and Micaela Jary, *Traumfabriken made in Germany: Die Geschichte des deutschen Nachkriegsfilms 1945–1960* (Berlin: Edition Q., 1993).

3. For a typical ideology-critical reading, see Gertrud Koch, "Wir tanzen in den Urlaub. Musikfilm als Betriebsausflug," *Filme* 3 (1980): 24–29.

4. The production numbers drew upon various traditions but relied most heavily on folk and popular styles and their ethnically coded sets, props, and costumes. However, in an effort to avoid all suggestions of authenticity, the spectacle of old-fashioned ethnicity was always presented from the perspective of contemporary styles, from the provocative sensuality of Latin dance to the aggressive sexuality of rock and roll. Other traditions exerted their influence in more indirect ways. The minimalist style of modern choreographers such as Martha Graham or George Balanchine remained limited to performances that openly aspired to high-culture status. Similarly, the expressive registers of *Ausdruckstanz* as interpreted by Harald Křeutzberg and Yvonne Georgi played only a minor role in the symbolic investments that implicated popular dance in the discourses of race and nation.

5. The soloist in this number, Kenneth Spenser, also appeared in the 1946 Broadway revival of *Show Boat*.

6. This point has been made by, among others, Jane Feuer, *The Hollywood Musical*, 2nd ed. (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1993), 43.

7. See Karsten Witte, "Gehemmte Schaulust. Momente des deutschen Revuefilms," *Wir tanzen um die Welt: Deutsche Revuefilme 1933–1945*, ed. Helga Belach (Munich: Hanser, 1979), 7–52; and Reinhard Klooss and Thomas Reuter, *Körperbilder: Menschenornamente in Revuetheater und Revuefilm* (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1980).

8. Klooss and Reuter, *Körperbilder*, 11.

9. The formal similarities between the theatrical and military choreography of the masses, which constitute the basis of such allegorical readings of the (fascist) culture industry, appear only in a few films about girls' "dancing troupes" (*Tanztruppen*). Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, musical forms, dance styles, and staging conventions much more pervasively celebrated the power of the star system, thereby suggesting a greater investment in the question of individual (rather than collective) self-realization. To give only one example, the remarkable continuities in Marika Rökk's career show to what degree the "Merry Widow" rather than the "Tiller Girls" remained the predominant influence in the approach to ethnic and national stereotypes, including in the gendered coding of romance and sentiment.

10. On Brauner, see Claudia Dillmann-Kühn, *Artur Brauner und die CCC: Filmgeschäft, Produktionsalltag, Studiogesichte 1946–1990* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsches Filmmuseum, 1990).

11. Katrin Sieg, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in Postwar Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

12. On the discourse of blackness in German culture, see Fatima El-Tayeb, *Schwarze Deutsche: Der Diskurs um Rasse und nationale Identität, 1890–1933* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2001); and Reinhold Steingroever and Patricia Mazon, eds., *Not So Plain as Black and White: Afro-German History and Culture from 1890–2000* (Binghamton: SUNY Press, 2002).

13. Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

14. One of the few exceptions occurs in *La Paloma* when Louis Armstrong invites a young blond girl from the prompt box to join him for a lullaby. The

appropriation of jazz and blues is more pronounced in *Schlagerfilme* like *Die große Chance* (The Big Chance, 1957, dir. Hans Quest), where African-American jazz musicians jam with Americanized Germans while Catholic priests teach Negro spirituals to their youthful flock.

15. On Weimar Berlin and the famous stage revues by Eric Charell, Hans Haller, and James Klein, see Wolfgang Jansen, *Glanzrevuen der zwanziger Jahre* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1992). On Berlin nightlife during the 1930s and 1940s, see Knud Wolffram, *Tanzdielen und Vergnügungspaläste: Berliner Nachtleben in den dreißiger und vierziger Jahren* (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1992). On the history of music and dance in German cinema, see Katja Uhlenbrok, ed., *MusikSpektakelFilm: Musiktheater und Tanzkultur im deutschen Film* (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1998); and Malte Hagener and Jens Hans, eds., *Als die Filme laufen lernten: Innovation und Tradition im Musikfilm 1928–1938* (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1999).

16. For a brief survey of this hybrid genre, see Tim Bergfelder, “Between Nostalgia and Amnesia. Musical Genres in 1950s German Cinema,” *Musicals: Hollywood and Beyond*, ed. Bill Marshall and Robynn Stilwell (Exeter: Intellect Books, 2000), 80–88.

17. For reassessments of postwar culture that focus on the category of gender, see Erica Carter, *How German Is She? Postwar West German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), especially the chapter “Film, Melodrama, and the Consuming Woman” (171–201); and Hanna Schissler, ed., *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany, 1949–68* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), especially Ute Poiger, “A New ‘Western’ Hero? Reconstructing German Masculinity in the 1950s” (412–27). On the dynamics of gender and race, also see Heide Fehrenbach, “Rehabilitating Fatherland: Race and German Remasculinization,” *Signs* 24 (1998): 10–15.

## On Location

### *Das doppelte Lottchen, The Parent Trap, and Geographical Knowledge in the Age of Disney*

*Joseph Loewenstein and Lynne Tatlock*

In the cheerful, enervated manner of contemporary reference, the pan of vestigial forest at the summer camp in Disney’s *Parent Trap* of 1998 catches a rustic signpost. One sign shows the way to the “Sportsfield”; the other to “Timbuktu.” In what seems a gesture of film-school post-modernity, this second sign points beyond Timbuktu to the English-dubbed version of *Charlie & Louise* (1993), a German sibling of the American film, and points specifically to the geomathematical word problem that a nasty and nastily conventional examining board has devised to stump the unacademic twin, Charlotte.

EXAMINER: One train is traveling from Hamburg at 60 km an hour. Another train is coming from Berlin at 40 km an hour.

How far apart will the trains be one hour before they meet?

CHARLIE: One from Hamburg, the other from Berlin—

EXAMINER: Yes, yes, who cares? They can be traveling from Timbuktu to Disneyland if you want.<sup>1</sup>

Charlotte—or Charlie, as she calls herself—can solve the problem because she is not Charlie, but the thoughtful and sober Louise, impersonating Charlie. Although she is not thoughtful enough to refuse the premise of trains traveling at speeds that would bring modern Europe to economic collapse, she is sober enough to take the examiner’s exasperated clue, which is that local origins are irrelevant to modern understanding. Our subject here is that lapse of confidence in local distinction suggested by this story problem. We will trace in a series of remakes a microhistory of forgotten place.

Hamburg and Berlin were not always reducible to Disneyland and